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PAGE 01 VIENNA 03170 151441Z

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ACTION CU-03

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 /016 W

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R 151100Z APR 75

FM AMEMBASSY VIENNA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5360

INFO USIA WASHDC

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE VIENNA 3170

STATE FOR CU/WE

USIA FOR IWE

E.O. 11652: N/A

SUBJECT: CONTROVERSIAL UNIVERSITY REORGANIZATION LAW PASSED

1. THE SPO'S UNIVERSITY REORGANIZATION LAW PASSED BY PARLIAMENT APRIL 11. THE PARLIAMENTARY VOTE WAS UNDER PARTY DISCIPLINE AND ALL OPPOSITION PARTY MEMBERS VOTED AGAINST THE LAW.

2. THIS REORGANIZATION CALLS FOR MAJOR CHANGES IN AUSTRIA'S HIGHER EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM: A) A UNIVERSITY DIRECTOR WILL BE APPOINTED TO EACH UNIVERSITY AS THE TOP ADMINISTRATIVE AND FINANCIAL OFFICER. HE WILL BE ON THE SAME LEVEL AS THE UNIVERSITY RECTOR BUT WILL BE RESPONSIBLE TO THE MINISTRY OF SCIENCE AND RESEARCH; B) ALL INSTITUTES AND PROFESSIONAL CHAIRS IN ANY ONE MAJOR FIELD WILL BE MERGED INTO ONE LARGE INTERDISCIPLINARY INSTITUTE UNDER A DIRECTOR WHO WILL BE ELECTED FOR TWO YEARS BY AND RESPONSIBLE TO A "CONFERENCE BOARD" CONSISTING OF FULL PROFESSORS, ASSISTANT PROFESSORS AND INSTRUCTORS, AND STUDENTS, EACH WITH ONE-THIRD REPRESENTATION; C) ALL INSTITUTE AND DEPARTMENTAL LIBRARIES TO BE MERGED INTO ONE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY UNDER THE CONTROL OF THE MINISTRY.

3. COMMENT: MANY FULL PROFESSORS AND DEPARTMENTAL CHAIRMEN HERE HAVE FOR LONG PLAYED THE ROLE OF PETTY DICTATORS IN BOTH ACADEMIC AND ADMINISTRATIVE QUESTIONS. IN THAT SENSE THEY HAVE BEEN ASKING FOR TROUBLE FOR A LONG TIME. HOWEVER, THE YOUNGER GENERATION OF FULL PROFESSORS, MANY OF WHOM ARE WELL-KNOWN TO US

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AND HAVE STUDIED IN THE U.S., HAVE ALREADY BEGUN TO MODERNIZE AND LIBERALIZE THE UNIVERSITY ENVIRONMENT BOTH IN VIENNA AND ELSEWHERE

IN AUSTRIA. THIS NEW LAW, WHICH HAS BEEN PUSHED BY THE SOCIALISTS UNDER THE BANNER OF DEMOCRATIZATION AND FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY, APPEARS TO BE MORE OF AN IDEOLOGICAL THAN A PRAGMATIC GOAL OF THE SOCIALIST PARTY LEADERSHIP. ONE ELEMENT OF THIS IS, WE THINK, THE SPO'S BELIEF THAT THE NEW LAW WILL SERVE TO SHARPLY RESTRICT WHAT IT CONCEIVES OF AS BEING THE CONSERVATIVE'S POWER OVER HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS THROUGHOUT AUSTRIA. IN THIS CONTEXT, THE NEW LAW IS AN IDEOLOGICAL PARALLEL TO THE BROADCASTING REFORM ACT WHICH WAS PASSED LAST YEAR. IT IS OUR IMPRESSION THAT UNIVERSITY STUDENTS ARE RATHER PASSIVE ABOUT THE NEW LAW, WHILE THE ASSISTANT PROFESSORS AND INSTRUCTORS ARE ABOUT SIXTY-FORTY IN FAVOR. THE FULL PROFESSORS ARE UNANIMOUSLY OPPOSED. IN THIS CONNECTION, THE VIENNA UNIVERSITY RECTOR HAS INFORMED US THAT ALL OF THE UNIVERSITY RECTORS IN AUSTRIA AGREED AT A RECENT MEETING TO RESIGN FROM THEIR POSTS IF THIS LAW WERE PASSED. MANY UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS HAVE ALSO THREATENED TO RESIGN OR OPT FOR EARLY RETIREMENT. IN THEIR VIEW THIS NEW LAW WILL MEAN THAT AUSTRIAN UNIVERSITIES WILL SUFFER FROM THE SAME DISORGANIZATION AND CONFLICT WHICH MANY GERMAN UNIVERSITIES HAVE EXPERIENCED DURING RECENT YEARS. BUCHANAN

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: LAW, REORGANIZATIONS, UNIVERSITY EDUCATION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 15 APR 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975VIENNA03170
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750132-0265
From: VIENNA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750449/aaaabtuc.tel
Line Count: 81
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION CU
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 07 APR 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <07 APR 2003 by BoyleJA>; APPROVED <08 APR 2003 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: CONTROVERSIAL UNIVERSITY REORGANIZATION LAW PASSED
TAGS: PFOR, SEDU, SPO
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006